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Phony \$1,000 Target Gift Card is the Scam of the Year

By [Matt Brownell](#)

Posted 5:01PM 01/18/13 Posted under: [Consumer Protection](#), [Ripoffs & Scams](#)

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A fake contest for a \$1,000 Target ([TGT](#)) gift card has been declared 2012's "Scam of the Year" by online complaint resolution platform [Scambook](#).

The fraud, which Scambook spotted back in November, actually spread via text rather than through social media or email channels. Victims of this "smishing" (SMS phishing) scheme



David J. Rogowski, AOL

received a text reading "Your entry last month WON! Go to TargetContests.com enter winning code 3847 to claim your FREE \$1000.00 Target gift card within 24hrs." Gullible users who clicked through to the (now-defunct) website and entered the code were prompted to enter a wide range of personal information, but never got their hands on the promised gift card.

The Target scam followed similar scams promising gift cards from the likes of Walmart ([WMT](#)) and Best Buy ([BBY](#)). And according to Scambook's Kase Chong, those two scams (in January and April, respectively) were smaller test runs for the main event, which dropped like a nuclear bomb in mid-November and prompted more than a hundred complaints to Scambook overnight.

"We believe that it was meant to center around the shopping holiday season," says Chong, who estimates that between 200,000 and 350,000 people across the country received the text on their cell phone. The scammers likely used a random-number generator that picked potentially active cell numbers with a reasonably high success



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rate.

The Long Con; A Scam That Breeds Worse Scams

The good news is that those people who clicked through to the site weren't directly relieved of their money. Instead, they were asked a series of seemingly innocuous questions intended to steal as much personally identifying information as possible, from the victim's mailing address to the name of his or her dog.

"The private info goes into a database, and they sell marketing lists on the black market," Chong explains. "Best-case scenario, you end up getting a whole lot more targeted spam." And the worst case scenario? Your information is used in identity-theft schemes -- or to con you with further scams: By including personally identifying details about you, the next wave of phishing emails will appear more convincing. In other words, this is a scam that breeds more effective scams.

Simple common sense should help most consumers sniff out this sort of fraud: If you didn't enter a contest to win a gift card, that should be your first tip-off that something is amiss. But Chong adds that cell phones are an unregulated "wild west" that makes them particularly susceptible to this kind of fraud. For instance, texting STOP to the number texting you -- a sort of universal code for unsubscribing to text lists -- will actually backfire in this instance, as it confirms to the scammers that your number is valid, and prompts them to send you more spam texts.

If you happened to fall for this scam, but have yet to receive any blow back, don't think you're out of the woods. Chong says that victims of the scam won't know for months, so for the foreseeable future, you should treat emails (and further texts) with a high degree of suspicion. For instance, you might get an email claiming to be from your bank that presents your address and phone number as "proof" that it's from a trusted source.

But here's one thing you won't be getting: A \$1,000 Target gift card.

Matt Brownell is the consumer and retail reporter for DailyFinance. You can reach him at Matt.Brownell@teamao.com, and follow him on Twitter at [@Brownellorama](#).

The Death of the PC

The days of paying for costly software upgrades are numbered. The PC will soon be obsolete. And *BusinessWeek* reports 70% of Americans are already using the technology that will replace it. Merrill Lynch calls it "a \$160 billion tsunami." Computing giants including IBM, Yahoo!, and Amazon are racing to be the first to cash in on this PC-killing revolution. Yet, a small group of little-known companies have a huge head start. Get the full details on these companies, and the technology that is destroying the PC, in a free video from The Motley Fool. Enter your email address below to view this stunning video.

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Their's nothing like a good scam to brighten your day!

"When you answer no to everything, you'll never be disappointed." me

"When you answer yes to everything, be prepared for a good take down." me

"Find a balance between the two, that works for you and never waiver." me

"If your silver came out of the ground, it belong's back in the ground."

csg out~

INCALIFORNIA

Wednesday at 3:00 PM



R

The stupidiy of Peple in this Cuontry never caeses to ammaze me!!!

Wednesday at 2:16 PM

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doll

You're right. and It's the love of money that makes people fall for stupid stuff like that.. hey tc

Wednesday at 2:56 PM

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Tom



The first thing I thought about when reading about this scam is Mitt Romney. Is Bain Capital behind this? I'm a little bit suspicious.

Wednesday at 1:36 PM



onebadcad

When you're that stupid you almost deserve to lose.

Wednesday at 1:08 PM

briancp67

+1

hey stupids if it is true good to be true and you go for it I don't feel your pain and if in doubt call the corporation
one thing no company hands out free of anything

Wednesday at 10:21 AM



Tara Friendly

-1

I couldnt spend \$10 in a Target they are so far behind Costco & Wal Mart I never shop there. Remind me of the old crummy K-Marts

Wednesday at 10:17 AM



rwikert

+2

I'm sorry, but you have to be dumber than a bag of rocks to fall for a scam like this.

Wednesday at 10:01 AM



Chris

+2

In this day and age of hackers and scammers, people should be aware already not to give out any personal information via phone, text, computer, etc. If it sounds to good to be true, it is....no one gives anything for free, especially a \$1000.00 DON'T GIVE OUT PERSONAL INFO.

Wednesday at 9:15 AM

Cindy

+1

始终坚持删除那个消息。

Wednesday at 8:59 AM



Deb

+1

Yeah they sent us an email saying we won a \$1,000.00 gift card from Target. My husband and I laughed about it knowing well that if it's too good to be true it is.

Wednesday at 7:27 AM

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CONSUMER NEWS

Text Message Gift Card Scam is Back for the Holidays

BY EMILY PATTERSON – NOVEMBER 30, 2012

POSTED IN: ALERTS/SCAMS, HOLIDAY, NATIONAL, SHOPPING



The gift card text message scam is back with a vengeance this holiday shopping season. Shoppers across the country are reporting receiving spam text messages, called smishing, saying they won a pricey gift card.

How the Scam Works:

You receive a text message. When you open it, you are surprised by a message informing you that you've won a Best Buy gift card (or Target, Wal-Mart or other major retailer). You just need to go to a website and enter a PIN, and the card is yours.



The text's URL leads to a website that has the company's colors and logo. It looks authentic with the company's name as the site's sub-domain (example: www.bestbuy.scamwebsite.com).

You are asked to enter the PIN and an email address. Then, you are taken to a form and instructed to fill out your name, cell number, mailing address and answer unrelated personal questions, such as "Are you interested in going back to school?" and "Are you diabetic?" When you reach the page to "claim your gift card," you instead find yourself directed to another site to apply for a credit card.

The texts are just a way to collect personal information for shady advertisers. Scammers often change the store names and cash amounts of the gift cards. A typical text message is below:

"Black Friday Winner #88323! You have WON the Best Buy Gift Card for \$1000! Get your prize at WEBSITE now! Use the code 5417."

What Can I Do About Scam Text Messages:

- Ignore instructions to text "STOP" or "NO" to prevent future texts. This is a common ploy by scammers to confirm they have a real, active phone number.
- Forward the texts to 7726 (SPAM on most keypads). This will alert your cellphone carrier to block future texts from those numbers.
- If you think your text message is real, be sure it's directing to a web address like Bestbuy.com or Target.com, not www.bestbuy.otherwebsite.com
- And as always, if you think getting a free \$1,000 gift card seems too good to be true, it probably is.

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Text Message Gift Card Scam is Back for the Holidays

Learn what your cellphone carrier has to say about stopping spam. Click here for advice from [ATT](#), [Verizon](#), [T-Mobile](#) and [Sprint](#).

To find out more about scams, check out the new [BBB Scam Stopper](#).

NOTE: Best Buy, Target, Wal-Mart, AT&T, Verizon, Sprint, and Western Union are BBB Accredited Businesses and/or National Partners.



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About Emily Patterson



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2 Comments



Mason

Posted December 3, 2012 at 12:37 PM

Reply

I get these texts all the time!!!

This is great advices, I will be doing this when I get these texts in the future!

Thanks for the tip!

"Forward the texts to 7726 (SPAM on most keypads). This will alert your cellphone carrier to block future texts from those numbers."

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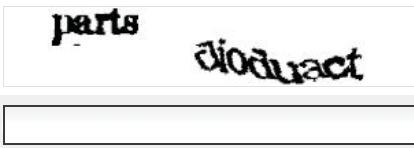
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How to stop scam text messages from getting to your cell phone



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Posted: 01/28/2013



By: Joe Ducey

"Your entry last month has WON! Go to www.****.com to claim your FREE \$1000 Target gift card within 24 hrs."

That's a text I got last week. If you haven't received one of these annoying texts, you know someone who has. Ask around.

It may say Target or Best Buy. It could say Walmart. But those stores have nothing to do with it.

Rarely do I hear from SO many people who want to believe so badly that something is real.

I've aired stories on it. I've personally written back dozens of people. Yet every day, I get calls, posts and emails that go much like this:

Consumer: Did I win?

Joe: Did you enter?

Consumer: Enter what?

Joe: Then how could you win?

NO! IT'S NOT REAL. IT'S A SCAM!

You answer the text, it leads to another site, and scammers get information they can later abuse.

Don't get me wrong. I ask people to send me their scams. But, they keep coming. Which leads me to believe some people ARE replying and scammers ARE getting what they want.

It's clear, exposing the scam ... repeatedly ... isn't enough.

The real solution? Keeping these texts off your phone in the first place!

So, I asked my friends at Scambook.com what we all want to know: How do scammers get my number?



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The Jodi Arias trial resumes for the 2008 murder of her ex-boyfriend in Mesa. **INSIDE:** See full coverage



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Sunday's 35-minute power outage during the Super Bowl game will not likely diminish New Orleans' chances of hosting another of the games, says NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell.



8 killed, 42 hurt in CA tour bus crash

The death toll in a Southern California tour bus crash is expected to rise Monday as authorities try to get to bodies still inside the bus, authorities said.



Phoenix Zoo to let mom name baby zebra

The male foal was born on January 19 to Masika and Punda and weighed in at 100 pounds.



Could your iPad cause sleep trouble?

Long term use of an iPad, tablet devices or laptops before bed can result in more serious sleep disorders, according to the study.

How to stop scam text messages from getting to your cell phone

They came up with three ways:

1. Scammers use special software that crawls websites like Facebook and Craigslist looking for phone numbers you post. **Don't post phone numbers.**
2. Scammers use random number generators to send out messages to both activated and deactivated numbers. If you reply, the software knows the number works, and you get more. **Don't reply.**
3. Scammers use computer viruses and hacking techniques to gather phone numbers from your own computer or private email account. Not much you can do about that one.

Advertisement



Go Daddy's kiss ad creating buzz

The Valley-based web domain company "Go Daddy" is known for its steamy ads, but many people are saying one went too far.

[Watch Video](#)

And I took it to the businesses we pay every month for the instrument that brings us these bogus texts.

So AT&T, Sprint and Verizon, how do we keep these annoying text messages off my phone?

Well, they offer help, sort of.

Verizon has something called "**Block that Spam**." It's free. You enter the annoying phone number and it's gone. You can also block texts from email or web addresses. But, it lasts 90 days and then you have to re-enter the number. And since the same scammers use different numbers each time, you'll be blocking a lot of numbers.

Read about [Verizon Wireless](#) free spam controls.

AT&T asks you to forward the spam message to short code 7726 (SPAM). They will then investigate, though it doesn't say that will automatically block the text message number.

Read about [AT&T's text message spam controls](#).

Both companies agree ... don't respond to the texts or you will likely get many more.

My advice? One word: **delete!**

Are there scams you see? Is there something that needs to be investigated?

This week's scam stopper: Never deposit a check you receive from someone you don't know. It could end up closing your bank account.

Email me with any scams you see or "like" [my ABC 15 Facebook page](#) and let's talk about them there.

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AlisonBrie

my neighbor's aunt makes \$87/hour on the computer. She has been out of work for 6 months but last month her pay was \$17900 just working on the computer for a few hours. Here's the site to read more... <http://www.mumsnet.com.qr.net/j62O>

User ID:<http://facebook.com/100005140625059>

6 Days Ago

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MikeMendis

Another one going around is here <http://www.ruscammer.com/6175833108/index.html> trying to get you to goto some view social site.

User ID:<http://facebook.com/1150475098>

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How to stop scam text messages from getting to your cell phone



ABC15 Arizona

Hit LIKE if you've received annoying scam messages on YOUR cell phone. Joe Ducey
Investigative Reporter offers 4 easy ways to stop them. DETAILS --> <http://bit.ly/TPm7JS>



<http://www.facebook.com/abc15/posts/10151277676626...>



Talkabout Productions,  Shazia Khan,  Gene Kreuziger,



Christopher D. Browning,  Debbie Bartelt and 183 more like this.

User ID:<http://facebook.com/abc15>

6 Days Ago

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WayneWonder

this article is quite the joke...abc15 cant even eliminate the scammers on this blog ... the grab line on abc15 home page said 4 ways--the article says 3 ... let me give you one good way to stop text scammers----dont text! i dont do text so i dont get scammed.....



DavidBoger likes this.

User ID:<http://facebook.com/100001831865904>

6 Days Ago

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AZBitesBack

ABC take your own advice and stop the spammer and his, sister, mother from posing how they got and so can you, or have one reporters try they scam gig and tell US IF IT WORKS to make \$8000 in so many days, weeks,



DavidBoger and



WayneWonder like this.

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